



City of Sterling, Illinois
Strategic Plan

2015-2019

City of Sterling, Illinois

212 Third Avenue

Sterling, Illinois 61081

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May 13, 2016

Citizens of Sterling:

We are honored to share this document – the City of Sterling Strategic Plan.

Strategic Planning is a process that builds on our rich history and assists us in creating our best possible future. The process enabled us to evaluate our current and future environments, establish a fresh vision and identify the key actions that will lead toward our most promising future.

The City began the process in 2015 with the goal of inclusivity – ensuring that a wide range of community voices would be heard. The City engaged an outside professional to ensure trust was established, discussion was free flowing and information was synthesized appropriately.

Developing a Strategic Plan requires commitment and buy-in on the part of the stakeholders. The facilitator met with the City Council and staff in group and one-on-one settings, and also sought a variety of voices in community meetings that included dozens of residents, business representatives and social organizations. The meetings were meant to examine our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as seen through the varied perspectives of all the participants.

Elected officials and senior staff then met in a retreat setting to discuss the emerging vision, review a range of ideas and to select key priorities. The result was a list of themes and major initiatives for the City to focus on as we plan for the future as described in the attached final report.

I am thankful to all those who participated in this process from the elected officials, to the staff and the residents. We remain committed to using this plan as a foundation for guiding our future decisions and look forward to continuing the push to make Sterling even better!

Sincerely,

Scott Shumard
City Manager

STERLING'S FUTURE.

My Notes, Ideas, Actions, Possibilities and Responsibilities:

[illegible]

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Leadership:

Elected Officials:

Skip Lee, *Mayor*

John Stauter, *Alderman at-Large*

Christopher Schuchard, *Alderman at-Large*

Retha Elston, *Alderwoman, Ward 1*

Christine Wilen, *Alderwoman, Ward 2*

Bob Conklin, *Alderman, Ward 3*

Joe Martin, *Alderman, Ward 4*

Appointed Official:

Scott Shumard, *City Manager*



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Overview:

Starting in early 2015, the City of Sterling, Illinois initiated a strategic planning process. The purpose of this process, as determined by the Mayor, Aldermen and with input from the City Manager, was to:

- Take a deep look at current circumstances and determine the direction the City will take now and over the next five years
- Sort through multiple issues, ideas and projects; decide on key priorities
- Seek input from residents, social service organizations and business leaders
- Assess economic and community changes
- Ensure the best possible and most desired future for Sterling
- Create a path/roadmap for action
- Team build

Process:

The process of strategic planning included face-to-face interviews with the Mayor, Aldermen, the City Manager, department directors and three groups of community/business participants.

Numerous steps were completed.

Step 1. Interview responses (“raw data”) from elected and appointed officials

Step 2. Interview responses from group meetings with residents, agency leaders and business persons

Step 3. Sterling by the Numbers

Step 4. A Draft/Preliminary Strategic Plan with Themes and Initiatives

In late August, city elected officials and appointed city staff met over two evenings to complete the public portion of the process. The participants discussed the above reports and developed city related service themes and initiatives.

Throughout this process, participants at all levels expressed a sincere desire to create a unified plan for Sterling’s future. The outcome of this process represents such a plan - from the perspective of city government.



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Broadly speaking, these noteworthy issues were discussed during the open sessions:

- 1) The City of Sterling is proud of its past. The participants expressed a heartfelt desire to honor their past and at the same time build a new future.
- 2) The participants recognized that the City is changing on many fronts. Given the significance of many issues, there is a sense of urgency to act.
- 3) Participants believe this may be the City's first ever strategic plan. Deciding to proceed with this strategic plan process is a bold and major step for Sterling.
- 4) During the wrap-up discussion some participants felt that the initiatives did not seem visionary enough. As noted by the facilitator, given that Sterling is new to this process, the opportunity for Sterling is to start by taking small steps. These initial actions will build confidence and increase community participation. The City is free, at any time, to add, subtract or modify its key priorities.
- 5) The City will need to create an annual process to select future initiatives.



Outline of document:

The balance of this document is organized into four sections.

Mission, Vision and Values

The Mission states why the City of Sterling, as a governing organization, exists.

The Vision represents how Sterling sees itself in the years ahead.

The Values reflect the primary city beliefs regarding attitude and behaviour.

Key Current Initiatives

Three initial key initiatives emerged during the process and are described here.

Themes and Initiatives

This section represents the major themes, affirmed opportunities and key initiatives that emerged during the strategic planning process.

Implementation

This part presents the steps necessary to keep the plan energized, relevant and moving forward.

STERLING'S FUTURE.

My Notes, Ideas, Actions, Possibilities and Responsibilities:

[illegible]

Mission, Vision and Values

Mission

The mission of the City of Sterling, Illinois is to govern, lead and provide city services in a manner that reflects the interests and values of Sterling's citizens and their highly desired quality of life.

Vision

Once the Hardware Capital of the World, Sterling has emerged as a community grounded in family life, superb local government services, a diverse economy and talented workforce.

Values

- Service
- Integrity
- Respectful
- Reliable
- Daring
- Responsible
- Dependable

Key Initiatives

During the strategic planning process, the participants identified three key Initiatives for 2015-2016 (not in any order)

- 1) Improved perception of city and pride by:
 - a) Physically: Improve our appearance and image by more aggressively pursuing code enforcement on gateways and throughways; Improve Sterling's gateways
 - b) Emotionally: improve how we tell our story through and with guest columns, community groups, etc.
- 2) Use wage report to bring equity to city employee pay
- 3) Create system for tracking and measuring progress of each key issue to keep elected officials, staff and the public involved and informed



STERLING'S FUTURE.

My Notes, Ideas, Actions, Possibilities and Responsibilities:

[illegible]

STRATEGIC THEMES and INITIATIVES

THEME: Community Sustainability

Vision:

Standing in the future, Sterling has a vibrant and welcoming presence. The City is known for its excellent parks, schools and health care services. The City is also known for having a diverse economy, a downtown that is a destination for tourists and a skilled labor force. Families and empty nesters participate in enjoyable activities; local culture activities are a regional draw. People are also attracted by Sterling's rich history. Sterling's Riverfront Development illustrates how Sterling created its new future. Sterling's downtown and events continue to draw large numbers of people from the region and surrounding states.

Affirmed Opportunities:

- Increase destination activities
- Improve appearance of entrances/gateways
- Encourage and create new development
- Create more public space
- Identify potential occupants for adaptive reuse of Riverfront
- Create more attractive amenities
- Create a new identity/image

- Increase opportunities for mixed use in the downtown
- Pursue commercial growth and retention
- Improve how to navigate/drive around downtown
- Resolve environmental hazards
- Create partnerships between city and businesses to work on common concerns and opportunities
- Enhance Sterling's overall appearance to outsiders
- Create a first-class museum to celebrate Sterling's heritage as the Hardware Capital of the World
- See young people who want to stay in Sterling for its neighborhoods, life style, jobs and culture
- The City, civic leaders and businesses engaged with a new generation of local stakeholders and leaders

Key Current Initiatives:

- Improved perception of city and pride by:
 - Physically: Improve our appearance and image by more aggressively pursuing code enforcement on gateways and thoroughways; Improve Sterling's gateways
 - Emotionally: improve how we tell our story through and with guest columns, community groups, etc.

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THEME: Economic Development and Workforce Development

Vision:

Standing in the future, Sterling and the region have experienced significant job growth. Sterling is known for having skilled and reliable labor. Sterling is a business friendly community and demonstrates regional cooperation for economic development.

Affirmed Opportunities:

- Increase job diversity – at all income and skill levels
- Move past wage stagnation
- Train for specific work force skills
- Young people stay in Sterling because they see Sterling’s strong labor market, excellent schools, welcoming culture and overall community environment
- Create a comprehensive and relevant economic development plan and strategy
- Respect for our past while creating a bold and attractive future
- Start Riverfront Development – start first phases of a multi-year plan.
- Riverfront has become a place where residents and visitors are attracted to spend their leisure time
- Annexation or pre-annexation of adjacent properties (developed and undeveloped)
- Sterling is known as a place for quality manufacturing and warehouse jobs
- City and entire community rigorously support existing businesses and their on-going local growth
- Sterling has decided what types of businesses and employers to attract; Sterling is making significant strides in attracting these businesses and empowering the needed workforce
- Sterling’s downtown thrives with restaurants, retail shops and visitors as business and building owners continue to invest in properties.
- The community continues to use the downtown as a center for activities and culture
- City, business and civic leaders lead a major coordinated regional effort to focus on job training and skill development
- Mixed uses, including residential, continue to expand and thrive in the downtown
- The City has continued to aggressively pursue the removal and rehab of buildings that impede Riverwalk development.

Key Current Initiatives:

- The City is a conduit with industry, vocational center, chamber of commerce and Sauk Valley Community College to tailor educational training programs to meet industry and City employee needs
- Improve communications and circulate reports from GSDC, Sterling Today; continue Emails from Chamber and Main Street
- Work with Challand to create Youth City Council Day (6th through 8th grade)

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THEME: Neighborhood Life

Vision:

Standing in the future, Sterling's residents display pride in their community and neighborhoods by actively participating in their community and maintaining their property and homes. Landlords have set a high standard for property maintenance.

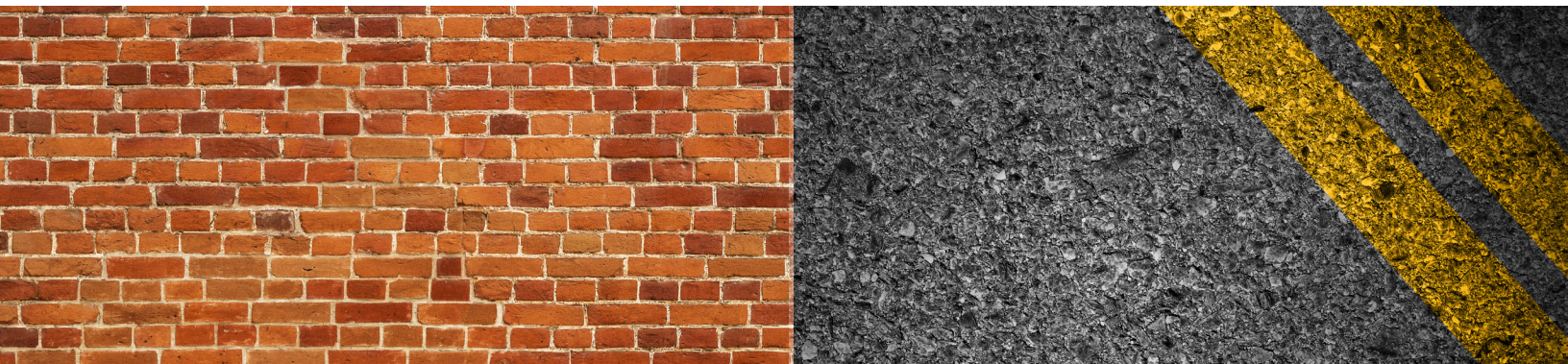
Affirmed Opportunities:

- Remove or improve neglected/blighted properties
- Increase and maintain a diverse housing stock - for all ages and needs
- Residents are proud of their home and city
- Create a city wide and regional bike and pedestrian way/paths connected to parks, neighborhoods, schools, the downtown, Sauk Valley Community College and other desirable locations
- Neighborhoods are inviting, clean and safe.
- Residents, businesses and visitors feel a commitment to a high quality-of-life in Sterling
- Neighborhoods are an attractive blend of historic, rehabbed and new homes

- The City has continued to seek and use grant funds for neighborhood revitalization.
- Steps include loans for rehab, grants for rehab, teardowns and new construction
- The City has a comprehensive residential and commercial property maintenance code that is enforced and supported by the community. The maintenance code prevents neighborhood and city decay and decline
- The downtown area is pedestrian friendly; streetscapes and traffic patterns invite drivers to stop, shop and spend time
- The police department continues to work with citizens to create dialogue aimed at creating and maintaining safe neighborhoods

Key Current Initiatives:

- Consideration of and passage of a new zoning code
- Uniform enforcement of residential and commercial maintenance code
- Neighborhood gatherings
- Citizen involvement



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THEME: City Services, Funding Projects and Having Skilled Employees to Complete them

Vision:

Standing in the future, city government is approachable and transparent; services are reliable. Citizens are engaged. Sterling's services are efficient and cost effective. Employees are known for their friendliness, cooperative spirit and skills. City-owned infrastructure is well maintained and reflects a well-run organization. City finances are stable. Sterling is a regional leader in initiating a cooperative and respectful stance with other governmental bodies

Affirmed Opportunities:

- The Mayor and Aldermen govern Sterling in a manner where they are well informed, are actively involved in discussion and debates regarding city services and are accomplishing the City Strategic Plan
- Improve strained finances through economic development, job growth, new and rehabbed housing and continued excellent fiscal management
- City workforce is well trained, skilled, customer service oriented and efficient with processes and projects. The culture of the organization is upbeat and progressive
- The City has identified its multi-year priorities and projects and has decided, on an annual basis, what priorities and projects to address
- Initiate a cooperative atmosphere with area local governments for purposes of increasing dialogue and improving

the efficiency and effectiveness of local government services

- The State of Illinois improves its reputation and financial picture
- Reverse the decline in local property values
- City staffing levels ensure that services are properly delivered
- Take action to believe and create a better outlook about Sterling's future
- City infrastructure including sidewalks, streets, parkways, storm water system, public facilities, sanitary sewerage system and street lighting is well constructed and maintained
- The City has a modern multi-year capital improvement plan that accounts for all capital assets and improvements based on known replacement and maintenance standards
- Employees of Sterling are paid at a level that is competitive with the area market
- The City has explored and adopted/expanded revenue sources to pay for needed infrastructure improvements

Key Current Initiatives:

- Seek new and alternative funding sources to pay for City services
- Use wage report to bring equity to city employee pay
- Develop means to list and prioritize projects
- Partner with economic development groups
- Expand property tax base

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THEME: Communications

Vision:

Standing in the future, the City's internal and external communications reflect a high level of trust, transparency and pride of accomplishment. The mayor and aldermen are well informed, focus on policies that drive the City forward and govern based on their shared values. Focus on the City Strategic Plan has helped to determine priorities and annual initiatives. Likewise, City employees feel engaged in their work and well informed. The City has taken a lead role in facilitating communication with residents and businesses through local media/press and other means to promote participation and knowledge of local events, business news, shopping opportunities, workforce development, City initiatives, culture and other means to promote Sterling as a great place to live, work and visit.

Affirmed Opportunities:

- The Mayor and Aldermen have adopted a five (5) year Strategic Plan. Annual goals are adopted and implemented. Quarterly accountability reports are placed before the Council for discussion and approval
- Communication between Sterling and other local governments has vastly increased

- Political leaders from local jurisdictions meet at least annually to discuss community/regional issues and goals
- The City web site is upbeat, informative, current and a leading source for community information. The City actively pushes information and opportunities for involvement out to the community
- Elected officials are well informed regarding opportunities to participate in ribbon cuttings, social activities and current events

Key Current Initiatives:

- Based on having multiple projects, issues and priorities, the City Council, with the Managers' guidance, annually chooses the top tier priorities
- Create system for tracking and measuring progress of each key issue to keep the City Council, staff and the public involved and informed
- In addition to use of local media, expand public awareness by increasing use of social media



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Implementation:

The City commits to the following on-going approach and steps:

Mayor and Aldermen: As a body, the elected officials:

- 1) Approve the Strategic Plan. Accept responsibility for the plans overall success
- 2) Discuss, decide and approve annual priorities
- 3) Support the plan and annual priorities through leadership, policy development, debate, funding and seeking community involvement
- 4) Expect the City Manager to provide regular written reports (to be discussed at city council meetings) regarding the status of each annual priority
- 5) As determined by the City Council, participate in on-going projects, oversight committees, public discussions and other steps that support and shepherd Council priorities

City Manager:

- 1) Accepts responsibility for the overall implementation of the plan
- 2) Develops and executes a communications plan intended to engage citizens, businesses and employees
- 3) Develops an on-going management strategy that engages the municipal organization in actions consistent with the annual priorities of the elected

officials including goal setting, funding options and project planning

- 4) Provides regular reports to the elected officials regarding the status of the annual priorities including timelines, obstacles and needs

Summary:

The elected and appointed officials of the City of Sterling recognize that it is up to them to lead and engage the community into its best possible future.

The City of Sterling faces many challenges. How well the leaders are able to address these challenges will determine the extent to which the city achieves its vision. As outlined above, Sterling's success as a community will require a collaborative and focused effort to address the aforementioned needs and aspirations.

As champions of this Strategic Plan, the elected officials and staff of the City affirm their intent to work together on behalf of and with the citizens and businesses of Sterling.



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Work Product/Consultant:

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